

‘Slut I hate you’: A Critical Discourse Analysis of gendered conflict on YouTube

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Abstract

Research on gendered conflict, including language aggression against women has tended to focus on the analysis of discourses that sustain violence against women, disregarding counter-discourses on this phenomenon. Adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this paper draws on the Discourse Historical Approach to examine the linguistic and discursive strategies involved in the online conflict that emerges from the polarisation of discourses on violence against women. An analysis of 2,304 consecutive YouTube comments posted in response to the sexist Greek song *Καριόλα σε μισώ* ‘Slut I hate you’ revealed that conflict revolves around five main topics: (a) gendered aggression, (b) the song, (c) the singer, (d) other users’ reactions to the song and (e) contemporary socio-political concerns. Findings also suggest that commenters favouring patriarchal gender ideologies differ in the lexicogrammatical choices and discursive strategies they employ from those who challenge them.

Keywords: violence against women, language aggression, conflicting discourses, conflict on YouTube

1. Introduction

The proliferation of online public spaces through social media can among others be seen as some kind of opening the “access to prestigious discourse types” and, therefore, as offering a greater or lesser potential for “democratisation of public discourse” (Fairclough 1992, 201). However, there is little consensus about the democratic potential afforded by such new technologies. While some focus on the plurality of voices that are allowed to be heard and the diverse identities that may gain visibility, others highlight that anonymity in digitally mediated communication may foster a feeling of unaccountability, thus reinforcing online incivility and polarisation of ideas (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010; Papacharissi 2009; van Zoonen et al. 2011). Compared to other online platforms, YouTube has been identified as a particularly fertile ground for the emergence of online conflict mainly due to the nature of the interaction it affords (i.e. anonymous, asynchronous and largely uncontrolled). In addition, research suggests that language aggression on YouTube may take various forms (e.g. swear words, use of derogatory terms, insults, threats, sexual harassment) and may often be targeted at particular groups, e.g. on the basis of race or nationality (Murthy and Sharma 2018), religion (van Zoonen et al. 2011), sexuality and gender (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014a). Although research on gendered conflict on YouTube suggests that language aggression against women can be found both in the video contents (e.g. misogynist lyrics, advertisements, vlogs) and in users’ comments, studies focussing on how such conflict emerges and how it translates into text are still rare (see, however, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014a; Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011).

In light of the above, the goal of this paper is to identify and shed light on language aggression against women as this emerges from the negotiation of YouTube users’ views on gender and gender related practices in Greece. More specifically,

adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, this paper aims to examine the lexicogrammatical choices and the discursive strategies employed as YouTube users draw on divergent and often contradictory ideological viewpoints (discourses) to reproduce, maintain or challenge gendered identities and ideologies.

Greece is a particularly interesting case especially given the prevalence of strong traditional values concerning gender roles and power distribution, the low gender equality rates and gender stratification (Drosos and Antoniou 2019; European Institute for Gender Equality 2019; Kosyfologou 2018).¹ The data under analysis consists of 2,304 consecutive YouTube comments that were posted in response to the video clip of the Greek pop song *Καριόλα σε μισώ* ‘Slut I hate you’, which, shortly after its release on May 11th 2018, attracted the attention of several journalists, singers and the general public for the misogynist nature of both its lyrics and videoclip.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: After providing the theoretical framework on which this study is anchored (Section 2.1), the focus then is on the relationship between the affordances of online communication at the meso-level context of discourse practice and language aggression against women. Section 3 then deals with the methodological and the analytical procedures followed (e.g. data collection, coding and classification). The findings of our quantitative and qualitative analysis are discussed in Sections 4 and 5, respectively, moving from the strategies

¹ More specifically, in 2015, for example, while the EU average in gender equality rate in decision-making in political, economic and social areas was 48.5%, in Greece it was 27.5% (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). Gender stratification can also be seen in the limited number of managerial positions held by women in Greece (Drosos and Antoniou 2019). Discrimination is also reflected in the employment rate, which in 2015 was 46% for women and 64% for men (EIGE, 2019). As Kosyfologou (2018) explains, the Greek financial crisis that started in 2009, and the subsequent austerity measures and long-term unemployment have further reinforced “a male-centred and discriminatory gender division”, which in turn has led to an increase in gender violence against women. It has also been estimated that although 25% of women in Greece have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence (EIGE 2019), the strong traditional values concerning gender roles differentiation and power distribution lead to the low reporting rates of violence against women (VAW) (Chatzifotiou and Dobash 2001).

sustaining or reinforcing patriarchal gendered ideologies to the strategies users employ to challenge misogynist views.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical background

In several studies on conflict in digitally mediated communication, the use of linguistic choices that could be taken as rude (e.g. swear words) or as expressing verbal aggression (e.g. harassment, threat, belittlement) has been traditionally referred to as ‘flaming’ and the messages themselves as ‘flames’. Nevertheless, scholars have been sceptical about the use of the term as it has been used inconsistently as an umbrella term to describe “everything from curse words ... to vague notions of criticism, emotion, or hostility” (Lange 2006) and it implies a distinction between online and offline conflict, thus predisposing researchers to look for phenomena that are by definition different from offline communication (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014b). In this paper, we shall use the general term ‘conflict’ (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014a) as this emerges and is co-constructed in online interaction among groups or individuals whose views are ideologically misaligned.

Viewing discourse in Faircloughian terms, that is, in a more abstract sense taken as “language use as social practice” and, more concretely, as a “way of signifying experience from a particular perspective” (Fairclough 2013, 95–96), we adopt a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective and seek to examine how language can be used to reinforce, sustain or challenge conflicting gender discourses on YouTube. Our textual analysis draws on Reisigl and Wodak’s (2001) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), and particularly the five main discursive strategies employed in the presentation of positive ‘self’/‘us’ and negative ‘other’/‘them’: nomination, predication,

argumentation, perspectivisation and intensification/mitigation strategies. In so doing, our focus is on how women/men and supporters/opponents of the song *Καριόλα σε μισώ* ‘Slut I hate you’ are referred to in the YouTube comments under investigation (nomination strategies) and what attributes are ascribed to them (predication strategies). These nominations and predications are then discussed in terms of (i) how (if at all) YouTube users try to persuade readers of the validity of their claims (argumentation strategies), (ii) the perspective from which these representations and arguments are expressed (perspectivisation), as well as (iii) the means through which they are intensified or mitigated (intensification/mitigation strategies).²

Even though the DHA distinguishes between “four dimensions of context” (Reisigl 2017, 52–53), this paper will follow Fairclough’s (2010, 133) “dimensions of discourse” and will, therefore, assume a macro-, meso- and micro-dimension of context. This conceptualisation of context allows for a model of discourse analysis that can account for the three levels (micro/meso/macro) of sociological analyses. The importance of a tripartite discourse analysis for the study of conflict lies in the fact that it allows for more balanced approaches than previous research on conflict and im/politeness phenomena, which “has tended to gravitate to the two ends, focusing heavily either on the micro or the macro levels” (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Sifianou 2019, 99). In addition, such an analysis of context facilitates the examination of the features of interdiscursivity and intertextuality, namely the interconnections between different texts, genres and discourses in a text. As a micro-level analysis of the linguistic features and the discursive strategies through which gendered ideologies translate into text cannot be detached from the meso-level discourse practice and the macro-level

² Regarding argumentation, Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 74–75) highlight the role of logical fallacies and *topoi*. In their terms, *topoi* can be described as “parts of argumentation that belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable, premises” and as “content-related warrants or ‘conclusion rules’ that connect the argument with the conclusion, the claim, [therefore justifying] the transition from the argument to the conclusion”.

context, in what follows we first reflect on the main features of communication and conflict on YouTube and then move on to ideologies and practices relevant to violence against women.

2.2 Meso-level context: communication and conflict on YouTube

Focussing on the meso-level context of discourse practice, it is worth noting that conflict and aggression have been found to be more frequent and salient in digitally mediated communication than in face-to-face communication, with YouTube being one of the most notorious platforms for these phenomena (Murthy and Sharma 2018). Accounts for the prevalence of conflict in online environments typically draw on anonymity, lack of contextual information, and the concept of deindividuation, i.e. the situation in which people experience some kind of identity switch when found together in groups and tend to conform to perceived group norms, including unrestrained, anti-normative and aggressive behaviour (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2014a; Reicher et al. 1995). Yet, there is little consensus on the reasons making conflict on YouTube more prevalent than other online platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). Besides deindividuation and anonymity secured with the use of pseudonyms, some have also highlighted the difficulty of policing offensive content as a result of YouTube's 'community' based monitoring system and the plethora of activities users are engaged in as well as the brevity of interaction stemming from the very limited social networking features of the platform (Murthy and Sharma 2018; Rotman et al. 2009; van Zoonen et al. 2011).

Apart from brief and anonymous, interaction on YouTube has also been characterised as (ant-)agonistic and polarised, asynchronous and polylogal. Van Zoonen et al. (2011, 1291) found that exchanges in the comments network are rarely conducive to fertile dialogue or mutual understanding; rather they primarily come in

the form of ‘pluralistic agonism’ (i.e. the right of others to speak is acknowledged) and ‘antagonism’ (i.e. threads of comments that “look like shouting matches between angry people aiming to silence each other”). At the same time, as deindividuation facilitates group cohesiveness and YouTube users find which group they ideologically identify with, opinions become polarised as users tend to participate in a way that rejects the views of the out-group while favouring those of their in-group (Lee 2007). In addition, YouTube interactions have been described as asynchronous online polylogues, or else, multi-participant interactions with double articulation on the grounds that users have the option to choose when to contribute to the textual polylogues as well as whether they wish to do so actively or passively (i.e. with/out posting audiovisual/textual responses) (Bou-Franch and Blitvich Garcés-Conejos 2014b; Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011). This asynchronous, polylogal and doubly articulated interaction constitutes a textual record of exchanges that remains open to public participation for as long as the triggering video-clip remains posted on the web.

2.3 Macro-level context: violence against women

Language aggression against women in computer mediated communication could be seen as a continuum between offline and online violence against women (VAW) (Ging and Siapera 2018).³ Although with the advent of the Internet it was believed that online spaces could increase chances of equal participation in online environment and provide a more secure place for women, it seems that gender

³ Violence against women is a violation of human rights that refers to various forms of gender-based violence. Instances of VAW can be found in both private and public spheres and their scale may range from sexist media portrayals to femicide, including various types of abuse that result in the physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering of women (World Health Organization 2013, 5). Harmful practices against women seem to persist in contemporary societies since subtle aggressions (or micro-aggressions) are neglected while more extreme cases of aggression constitute social taboos and thus, remain unchallenged (Bou-Franch 2014, 177). An extensive body of research has highlighted a positive correlation between patriarchal social norms, gender inequality and VAW (Herrero et al. 2017, 385; Maclaughlin et al. 2012, 625; Martin 2003, 342). More specifically, in contexts where men have more power, authority and social privilege than women, violence is normalised by means of patriarchal ideologies that support the existence of an inherent difference between men and women and justify men’s dominance and women’s low status (Glick and Fiske 2001, 110).

inequality determines women's online experiences, too. As Shaw (2014, 275) argues, the online space "comes out of a position of privilege that has been created via the same historical events that made 'tech culture' a particular form of masculine culture". In fact, online spaces do not only remain largely male dominated that provide limited chances for equal participation, but they also constitute sites where gendered abuse and stereotyping can thrive (Molyneux et al. 2008). The technological affordances of the digital media have contributed to the reproduction of hegemonic gendered ideologies and have facilitated new forms of VAW and systemic misogyny, e.g. cyberstalking, sending unsolicited nude images, non-consensual posting of nude images/videos, rape threats and negative comments on social networking sites (Bou-Franch 2014, 177; Jane 2014). Media portrayals of VAW typically limit opportunities for women to express their point of view, present them as responsible for their own victimization, include myths and stereotypes that legitimise violence and focus on sensational descriptions of the violent acts undermining their importance (Dwyer et al. 2012; Eastal et al. 2015; McDonald and Charlesworth 2012).

As regards YouTube, the ratio of male to female participants as well as the content of both videos (including music videoclips) and comments are also indicative of a culture of male domination. Thelwall and Mas-Bleda (2018), for example, analysed comments under videos on science channels on YouTube and found that the ratio of female to male commenters was 1 to 39. In their study on vlogs on YouTube, Milliken et al. (2017) point out that women were less likely to post negative comments and three times more likely to avoid replying to men's inappropriate comments that were directly targeted at them or women in general. Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014b) examined a corpus of 460 YouTube comments sent in response to four video-clips concerning domestic VAW and identified 261 strategies realizing discourse of

VAW, including: (a) minimizing the severity and/or frequency of abuse, (b) denying its very existence; and (c) blaming the woman for the abuse. The study also shows the way discourse elements are linked to social identities and gender ideologies (e.g. positive in-group versus negative out-group presentation).

In popular music videos on YouTube, mainstream discourses about women have also been found to reproduce hegemonic gender ideologies about the accepted behaviour and the role women should have in a society. In country songs, stereotypical representations of women may include associations with traditional roles (e.g. housewife), distrust and dependence upon men (Rasmussen and Densley 2017). Rap music has also attracted researchers' attention for its "extremely misogynist lyrics" (Fischer and Greitemeyer 2006) with the most common themes in women's representation including: (a) gendered derogatory terms (e.g. "bitches", "sluts", "whores", "shitty hoes"); (b) sexual objectification (i.e. suggesting that women should only be 'used' sexually); (c) distrust (e.g. presenting women as liars who accuse men of false rape); (d) legitimization of VAW (e.g. suggesting that women deserve to be beaten when acting disrespectfully towards men), and (e) celebration of human trafficking and pimping (Weitzer and Kubrin 2009).

3. Methodology and Data

3.1 The triggering song: a chronicle

The song *Καριόλα σε μισώ* 'Slut I hate you' was released on the YouTube channel of the recording company Digital Ray Records on 11th May 2018. In the videoclip, the singer, Christos Dantis, performs the role of a man who verbally abuses his partner/wife and threatens to burn her alive for her being unfaithful and acting as if the only reason she is in relationship with him is her desire for money and material goods. Both the

song and the singer attracted the attention of several journalists, singers and the general public and immediately got fanatical supporters and opponents. On 15th May 2018, in a press release, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality in Greece stated that the song is not but a sexist representation of women, which reproduces gender stereotypes and legitimises gender violence as it presents violent acts as a means of solving problems in a marital relationship. Subsequently, in an interview, the singer defended his attempt to be in line with the current trends in music industry, underlining that the prevalence of insults is an integral part of modern songs. Interestingly, he also argued that the lyrics of *Shut I hate you* are not sexist concluding that every singer should have freedom of speech and the right to choose the songs they perform while those who do not like them should just choose not to listen to them.

3.2 Analytical procedure

The selection of the data was based on the assumption that the YouTube comments made in response to the song will be rich in conflicting discourses on language aggression against women. The data was retrieved with the aid of the online tool *YouTube Comment Scraper*. The tool allows for extraction of comments from YouTube videos using YouTube's application programming interface (API), storing comments in data sheets as CVS files (can be opened in Excel), and including information on the posters (i.e. those who posted an initial comment and those who reacted to this) and the comments (e.g. date, number of reactions).⁴

An initial close reading of the comments revealed that YouTube users' replies to the video were rather polarised, with most of the comments either strongly disapproving or favouring the song. In light of this, a coding system was created and

⁴ No ethical approval was necessary for the data used and gathered for this study since comments on YouTube are open to the public. Also, given the media debate around the song under analysis, it can be argued that users who shared their views on the song were aware that their posts would be exceptionally public. Nevertheless, to minimize any possible impact on the users whose comments we are analysing, all comments were anonymised.

all comments were classified into three broad categories: a) those that more or less explicitly approve of such songs, lyrics, videoclips, and generally aggression against women, b) those which are against patriarchal views and practices and c) those which fell in neither of these categories, such as comments which were written in another language or were referring to completely irrelevant topics (e.g. references to other singers, queries about the music of the song, personal narratives). This process entailed an individual coding by each of the researchers and then a joint coding, where all discrepancies were discussed and resolved. Then, following the same procedure, a thematic analysis was conducted aiming at identifying and coding patterns of topics discussed in the corpus as well as strategies through which language aggression against women was expressed, reinforced or challenged. Finally, a qualitative analysis of these strategies was performed.

4. Results

Coding and distinguishing between comments more or less *sustaining or favouring aggression and misogynist/patriarchal* views (henceforth SFAMP) and those *challenging aggression and misogynist/patriarchal* views (henceforth CHAMP) revealed that the former are nearly four times more in number (see figure). This distinction also showed that the conflict between these polarised discourses revolves around specific topics (e.g. the quality of the lyrics, the singer, who likes or dislikes the song) and that YouTube users employ specific discursive strategies to present one view or another (see Tables 1 & 2).

[insert figure 1]

More specifically, the song itself was the most frequently discussed topic in the corpus, with most SFAMP comments (44.86%) indicating approval of the song by means of

evaluations, identification of favourite snapshots from the videoclip, dedications of the song to someone or mere repetition of its lyrics and CHAMP comments (33.71%) expressing their frustration, particularly with regards to the lyrics. The singer himself was the second most frequently discussed topic, where 21.32% of SFAMP comments express support to or agreement with the singer while 33.14% of the CHAMP comments express their frustration or negative surprise with the singer's decision to release such a song. The comments referring to the singer have the structure and characteristics of dialogic/conversational text types, where the commenter is the speaker and the singer is referred to in vocative noun case and thus assumed to be the addressee/reader of the message. Other topics for SFAMP comments involve expressing gendered aggression by means of swearing with gendered terms (13.78%) or dehumanising women (5.46%). These were contested by CHAMP comments challenging the very act of making generalisations for women (3.68%) as well as comments expressing concern about contemporary Greek society (10.48%) and the inappropriate moral values that such songs legitimise (7.37%).

However, one of the issues raised by users whose posts were classified as CHAMP was that several CHAMP comments were deleted by the channel owners, i.e. the recording company (see strategy "reporting censorship" in Table 2). This does not account only for the limited number of CHAMP comments but importantly also for the limited potential for democratisation of discourse in the platform of YouTube. By deleting comments which challenge the very existence of such songs and argue against the misogynist content of the videoclip, the recording company probably aims at maximising the popularity of the song and thus their profit. In so doing, however, they make patriarchal values seem more prevalent, too, as they impede the plurality of voices

one could be exposed to by reading users' comments and restrict the degree of ideological conflict.

[insert tables 1 & 2]

5. Discussion

5.1. Sustaining / favouring violence against women

In this section, we draw on instances of explicit gendered aggression against women found in the corpus. We focus on the comments employing SFAMP strategies, particularly those expressing agreement with the singer and those expressing gendered aggression by means of swearing with gendered terms. The examination of comments employing these strategies revealed a discursive construction of a dichotomy between men/the singer and women/the dancer of the videoclip, with a positive description of the former and a negative description of the latter. In what follows, we argue that the ideologies inherent in the polarization of the in-group and the out-group serve to legitimise both male domination and verbal or physical aggression against women.

[insert Table 3: nominations/predications of the singer in SFAMP]

Regarding nomination and predication strategies for representing the singer, analysis revealed that he was most frequently addressed in the vocative/nominative case of his name and surname in augmentative forms (e.g. *Χρηστ-αρα* "Christ-AUG SUF" and *Δαντ-αρος* "Dant-AUG SUF"). Other address terms include socially deictic expressions such as *αδερφέ* 'brother' and *φίλε* 'friend', which in most instances are accompanied by the possessive pronoun *μου* 'my'. These create a sense of deep intimacy between the audience and the singer as well as solidarity among men. The singer is also referred to with the proper noun *Χρυσόστομε* 'Chrysostom/ silver-tongued' and the noun *καθηγητής* 'teacher'. In Greek, the term *Χρυσόστομος* "Chrysostom" is colloquially used to describe someone who is brave enough to be honest, observe or say something

that no one else has dared to say while *καθηγητής* ‘teacher/professor’ may idiomatically refer to anyone who is assumed to have admirable knowledge or expertise in something. Through these terms, the singer is admired for his courage to describe women as disloyal and as lovers of money, and is represented as an exemplary role model who ‘teaches’ the correct way of treating such women.

From a CDA perspective, it is worth reflecting on the ideological implications of these representations. The positive evaluations attributed to the singer may suggest that the commenters approve of the singer’s use of misogynist terms and his threats to kill his partner, as these are expressed in the song lyrics and the role playing performed in the video clip. These representations of the singer can be seen as instances of implicit legitimization of VAW by explicitly reinforcing the authority of the person who views it as a logical response to his feeling of betrayal.

Explicit language aggression against women was also exercised through swearing with gendered terms. More specifically, in the vast majority of comments, women/the dancer were mainly referred to as *καριολες* ‘sluts’ and *πουτανες* ‘whores’, which is in agreement with studies suggesting that these two derogatory terms are the most common sexist representations of women in song lyrics (Fischer and Greitemeyer 2006). As the phrase *Καριόλα σε μισώ* ‘Slut I hate you’ is repeated in the title and the chorus of the song, commenters who generally like the lyrics or feel they relate to the male singer reproduced such terms in their comments to account for their feelings/views regarding women. In so doing, they often refer to the patriarchal stereotype suggesting that all women are inherently promiscuous, as in the following comment:

(1) Καριολες & πουτανες όλες⁵

⁵ Spelling and grammar have remained as in the original.

Sluts & whores all of you

This hasty generalisation was found to be a *topos* in our corpus, where essentialising women as naturally promiscuous is taken as a fact and thus providing any evidence or explanations is deemed unnecessary. This generalised view is further intensified by other strategies, such as positive in-group (men) and negative out-group (women) descriptions as in:

(2) Πάντα θα υπάρξει μια καριόλα που θα χαλάει τα καλύτερα παιδιά..

There will always be one slut who will be destroying the best guys...

In (2), besides the reference to women as ‘sluts’ and men as *τα καλύτερα παιδιά* ‘the best guys’, transitivity is of interest. The woman/‘slut’ appears as the agent whereas men/‘guys’ as the patient of the verb “destroy” suggesting that men are victims of women who have the power to ruin even those of high moral integrity. The continuous aspect in *θα χαλάει* ‘will be destroying’ highlights an ongoing process, rendering it as a general truth or diachronic fact. The idea that women are responsible for men’s actions is another traditional *topos* of patriarchal ideologies, and can be found in various discourses (consider, for example, in religious discourses the mythical figure of Eve as Adam’s wife in the Bible).

Mocking users who expressed their frustration with the song and the singer was another strategy to implicitly legitimise VAW. This was mainly achieved by referring to them as feminists, which in this context seems to carry a highly negative connotation as in:

(3) comment	replies
Telio ala gt 15.000 dislike?	
Awesome but why 15.000 dislikes?	
	Γιατί 15000 καριόλες το είδαν
	Because 15000 sluts watched it
	dislike εκαναν οι μουνοδουλοι
	pussyslaves made the dislikes
	Φεμηνο-πατσαβουρες
	Femino-mops
	Θίχτηκαν οι ΦεμιNAZI
	Feminazi were offended

In (3) a user is wondering why such an *telio* ‘perfect’ song has received so many dislikes. In the responses they get in the polylogue, those who dislike the song are referred to as *καριόλες* ‘sluts’, *Φεμηνο-πατσαβουρες* ‘femino-mops’ and *ΦεμιNAZI* ‘feminazi’ and *μουνοδουλοι* ‘pussyslaves’. In Greek, *πατσαβουρα* ‘mop’ is used as a derogatory term for women and is sometimes taken as a near synonym for the term ‘slut’. The endocentric compounds ‘femino-mops’ and ‘feminazi’, with ‘feminist’ being the head of each term and ‘mops’ and ‘nazi’ modifying the head, respectively, imply that feminists are intolerant of opposing views and plurality of voices or share a sense of superiority similar to the one Nazis assumed for themselves. The term *μουνοδουλοι* ‘pussyslaves’ is another slang term used to describe a man who does everything a woman may ask for, even if this is against his own needs and desires. In other words, this compound word also serves to victimise men presenting them as slaves who are manipulated by women.

Another interpretation for the dislikes and negative comments of the videoclip is the assumption that they have been made by female YouTube users who have been annoyed with the representations of women in the lyrics of the song. Although this assumption may indeed hold truth, interesting is the implied suggestion that such a reaction is irrational and is only indicative of how bitter “the truth” of the song is, as in:

- (4) Τ έγινε κοριτσακια του instagram σας πειραξαν οι αληθειες του Χρησταιρα???

What’s wrong instagram girls-DIM SUF are you annoyed with the truths (told) by Christos-AUG SUF???

Turning to intensification/mitigation strategies employed in the examples above, i.e. the linguistic means modifying the illocutionary force of text producers’ utterances in respect to their epistemic or deontic status, the prevalence of ‘unmodalised declarative mood’ can be read as an intensification strategy through which commenters express categorical assertions to intensify their commitment to the validity of truth of their claims (Downing and Locke 2006).⁶

Gendered aggression against women was also expressed through nominations and predications of women that served to dehumanise and/or objectify women (see Table 4). Oversexualisation and a focus on physical appearance, namely references to decontextualized sexual parts of women’s bodies such as ‘butt’ and ‘lips’ metonymically standing for women was a common theme in users’ comments. Fragmenting female bodies makes women passive objects subject to male domination. Additionally, women were dehumanised by being represented as inanimate objects, e.g. *πιστόλι* ‘gun’ and *τσόκαρα* ‘wooden shoes’, or through representations that completely

⁶ For Downing and Locke (2006, 379–381) “an unmodalised declarative constitutes a stronger statement of fact than any additional expression of certainty can” and “all modal expressions are less categorical than a plain declarative”, which is why they view modality as expressing a **relationship** to reality while an unmodalised declarative as treating the process **as** reality.

disregard their human attributes such as the animalistic dehumanisation in *αδέσποτη σκύλα* ‘stray bitch’, *βδέλλες* ‘leeches’. Although the discursive dehumanisation and objectification of women do not explicitly support VAW, they sustain patriarchal ideologies that remove women’s agency and legitimise the idea that female bodies exist primarily for the sexual pleasure of men.

[Insert Table 4: nomination and predication of women in SFAMP]

5.2. Challenging violence against women

In the corpus under analysis, YouTube users challenging VAW mainly underline the sexist and misogynist nature of the song and the videoclip and express their frustration with its content. Viewing such songs as a social problem in contemporary Greece, they also offer their own accounts for the reasons and the social actors involved in the perpetuation of this problem and reflect on the repercussions this problem may entail. Among the most prevalent social actors mentioned here are: (a) singers in general and Dantis in particular; (b) their audience; (c) the music industry; and (d) YouTube. The discursive representation of these social actors, and particularly how they are called (nomination strategies) and what qualities are attributed to them (predication strategies) can further illustrate why and in what ways these actors are seen as contributors to the reinforcement of VAW through such songs.

Starting with the singer and the music industry (including record companies and radio broadcasting companies), commenters employing CHAMP strategies mainly blame them for being solely interested in their profits and popularity, rather than the quality of their songs, therefore producing *μουσική χωρίς παιδεία* ‘music with no educational content’. The singer is mostly referred to with the vocative noun case of his surname (*Δάντη* ‘Danti’), which, in contrast with SFAMP comments, can here be taken as a strategy through which commenters distance themselves from him. As can be seen

in the examples below, they present him and other singers as being ridiculed due to the low quality of such songs and blame them for pretending to be modern and educated, and failing to reach European standards of pop music.

- (5) (...) Δαντη αγορι μου τραβα να γραφεις στα καπι και ασε την ποπ δεν σου παει! (...) Εσυ και κατι αλλοι μας το παιζετε προχο και μορφωμένοι και εξευρωπαϊσμενοι αλλα.αντι να προβαλλετε σωστα πρότυπα στο εστω μικρο κοινο σας βγαζετε υλικό με χαλια στιχο χαλια, μουσικη (...), αντιγραφοντας αλλους "καλλιτεχνες", χωρις να περνάτε καποιο μυνήματα για εμας τη νεολαία

(...) Dantis my boy go join a senior centre and leave the pop music it doesn't suit you! (...) You and some others pretend to be progressive and europeanised but instead of presenting the right role models to your rather small audience you release a piece with awful lyrics, music (...) emulating other "artists" without communicating any messages to us the young generation

- (6) Ελληνική μουσική χωρίς παιδεία κυκλοφοράει εδώ και χρόνια ακούμε ότι σαβούρα βγαινει στο ραδιόφωνο επειδή τους νοιάζει το χρήμα..και τώρα βλέπεις τραγουδιστές παλιούς εποχής να τους φτάσουν σε σημείο να βγάζουν αυτά .τελειώσαμε

Greek music with no educational content has been released for years now we have been listening to all the trash that is played on the radio because they are interested in money only... and now you see old-time classic singers having reached the point where they release these. We're done.

- (7) Τι παρακμή, τι παρακμή. Σεξισμός σε όλο του το μεγαλείο. Κρίμα ρε Δάντη.

What decadence, what decadence. Sexism at its finest. It's a pity Dantis.

The use of the first plural pronoun in *για εμας τη νεολαία* 'to us the young generation' in (5) functions as a perspectivisation strategy through which the commenter indexes that they are speaking from the perspective of contemporary young generation. At the same time, the choice of this pronoun underlines a conflict between 'us' who are

ideologically opposed to sexist songs and ‘them’, i.e. those celebrating their circulation. Returning to the social actors being involved in *σεξισμός σε όλο του το μεγαλείο* ‘sexism at its finest’ in (7), equally important is the lack of control over the content of the videos uploaded on YouTube and the role of audiences supporting such songs. Focusing on the representation of the latter, commenters suggest that such a song cannot but appeal to *μισογύνηδες* ‘misogynists’, *μέσο, μάτσο, αμόρφωτο Ελληναρα* ‘average, macho, uneducated Greek-AUG SUF’, *χαζό Νεοέλληνα* ‘stupid Neohellene’ and generally those attracted by ephemeral trends and with no genuine love for music.

- (8) Τα αυτιά μου δε μπορώ να το ακουσω ας το κατεβάσει το YouTube ρε φίλε

My ears [hurt] I can’t listen to this; YouTube should delete it dude

- (9) Καλο θα ηταν οι σοβαροι καλλιτεχνες τουλαχιστον να κρατανε κι ενα επιπεδο... Ντροπη να ανεβαινουν τετοια τραγουδια και στο youtube που εχουν προσβαση και μικρα παιδια... ολα για τα λεφτα... ελεος...

It would be nice for good singers to keep up the level at least. It is a shame that such songs are being uploaded on YouTube since children have access to it...[they do] everything for the money... for God’s sake

- (10) Αρεσουν κατι τετοιες μαλακιες στον χαζο νεοελληνα, ο Δαντης καλο θα ηταν να σταματισει να ξεφτιλιζεται για μερικα ευρω παραπανω

Such bullshit appeals to the stupid Neohellene, it would be good for Dantis to stop disgracing himself for some more euro

- (11) Δυστυχως δεν τρολαρει, απλα ξερει τι πουλαει στον μεσο, ματσο, αμορφωτο ελληναρα. Κι εσεις τον αναπαραγετε και παιζετε το παιχιδι του δινοντας του αυτο που θελει: προσοχη

Unfortunately he is not trolling, he just knows what sells to the average, macho, uneducated Greek-AUG SUF. And you are copying him and you play his game by giving him what he wants: attention

Interesting here is the choice of the terms *Ελλην-άρας* ‘Greek-AUG SUF’ and *Νεο-έλληνας* ‘Neo-hellene’, i.e. self-referential terms that have circulated in popular culture

discourses since the 1990s to denote the social stereotype of a distinct breed of Modern Greeks (typically male) whose identity has been conditioned by the relative prosperity of the postdictatorial period in the 1980s, and appear to be attracted to comfort, luxury and imported lifestyles, have contradictory standards and lack deep awareness of socio-political issues (Kourniakti 2017, 344).

Lexical choices such as *ολα για τα λεφτα* ‘[they do] everything for the money’ in (9), *να ξεφτιλιζεται για μερικα ευρω παραπανω* ‘disgracing himself for some more euro’ in (10), *τι πουλαει* ‘what sells’ in (11) are instances of interdiscursivity as commenters draw on economic discourses to explain the rise in misogynist song lyrics in terms of an offer-demand relationship, where the audience constitutes a crucial factor in the sellability of a song. However, these representations of the singer and his supporters alone do not explicitly challenge the misogynist content of the song; rather, they implicitly do so by delegitimising the authority of those who reproduce VAW (e.g. singers), by criticising the reasons why such songs are produced (i.e. sellability) or by criticising those who leave it unchallenged (e.g. YouTube, audience).

VAW through songs is more explicitly contested with the CHAMP argumentation strategies of “challenging generalisations” and “expressing socio-political concern.” In the first case, commenters either refuse the very identity of ‘being a slut’ or offer alternative representations for women and the way they should be treated. In the second case, commenters express their concerns about the bad role models that sexist songs may promote to youngsters.

- (12) Και έρχεται ο Δάντης ο οποίος ήταν ένας κλασσικός τραγουδιστής με ωραία τραγούδια και ξαφνικά για να μπει στην ψυχосύνθεση της νεολαίας βγάζει ένα τραγούδι έξω από τα νερά του απλά για να είναι αρεστός στην νεολαία... Και μέσα από το τραγούδια κράζει μια γυναίκα καριολα... Και η νεολαία βρίσκει πάτημα σε αυτό και τώρα έχει βγει καραμέλα ότι όλες οι γυναίκες είναι καριολες... Σεβασμός

στις γυναίκες... Γιατι υπάρχουν και μανάδες και αδερφές... Δεν γίνεται να βάζουμε όλες τις γυναίκες σε ένα τσουβάλι... Και αν θέλετε να ξέρετε οι περισσότεροι "άντρες" από μια "καριολα" γεννηθήκατε...

And here comes Dantis, who was a classic singer with nice songs and suddenly in order to appeal to the young generation he releases a song that is out of his element just to be liked by the young generation. And through the songs he calls a woman slut ... And the youth build on this and now it has become a trend to say that all women are sluts... [Show] Respect to women... Because there are mothers and sisters too.... It is not right to put all eggs (literally:women) in one basket... For your information, most “men” you were born of a “slut”.

- (13) Απλα ντροπή όλα τα αγόρια πάνε και βρίζουν τις κοπέλες θα καταλαβετε βλέποντας τα σχόλια.. Ενα γιατί πιος ο λογος να βρησετε ενω έχετε άδικο μερικές κοπέλες είναι normal

It's simply a shame all these boys go and swear at girls you will see by looking at the comments. Why for what reason do you swear while you are wrong some girls are normal

- (14) Μου αρεσει ο δαντης,αλλα μου τα χαλασε με αυτο το τραγουδι (...)
.μονο λουλουδια παιδια στις γυναικες.οκ υπαρχουν κ εξαιρεσεις.στην τεχνη ολα επιτρεπτα οκ.οχι δεν μου αρεσει παντως ειναι προσβλητικος απεναντι στις γυναικες

I like Dantis, but he has disappointed me with this song. (...) Only flowers to women guys. Ok, there are exceptions. in art everything is accepted ok.no, I do not like it in any case it is offensive to women.

The examples above offer alternative gendered identities (e.g. *υπάρχουν και μανάδες και αδερφές* ‘there are mothers and sisters too’) and challenge the patriarchal ‘all-women-are-sluts’ *topos* by making use of what we could call a family *topos*, where the premise ‘mothers and sisters are women’ paired with the taken for granted premise ‘mothers and sisters cannot be viewed as sluts’ leads to the claim ‘not all women can be viewed as sluts’. In addition, the argument *μερικές κοπέλες είναι normal* ‘some girls are normal’ is further reinforced by the use of two popular Greek proverbs/clichés in Greek, i.e. *δεν γίνεται να βάζουμε όλες τις γυναίκες σε ένα τσουβάλι* ‘it is not right to put all eggs (literally:women) in one basket’ and *μονο λουλουδια παιδια στις γυναικες* ‘only flowers to women guys’, which suggests that women should only be treated with

kindness. The use of the quantifiers *μερικές* ‘some’ and *(δεν ...) όλες* ‘not all’ can be seen as mitigation strategies, which may serve to reduce the degree of conflict, indicating that the commenter here does disagree, but only partially, possibly in an attempt to establish common ground with misogynist commenters and maximise chances of being heard.

In addition, viewing sexist lyrics as symptomatic of a moral decay in contemporary Greek society, opponents of the song consider it to be *akatalilo gia paidia* ‘inappropriate for children’ in that it does not set *ωραίο παράδειγμα* ‘a good example’, *ούτε ηθικά ούτε αισθητικά ούτε πνευματικά θα βελτιώσει την ψυχή του ακροατή* ‘nor does it have a positive moral, aesthetic or spiritual effect on listeners’, and especially those *χωρίς την κατάλληλη κριτική σκέψη* ‘lacking critical thinking’.

- (15) Auto to tragoudi einai ena tragoudi pou den pernaei kanena sosto minima kai einai akatalilo gia paidia den dinei proagei sosta protipa

This song is a song that does not communicate right messages and it is inappropriate for children and it does not promote good examples

- (16) Μπραβο παιδια! Ωραιο παραδειγμα δινουμε! Στην αρχη λεξεις οπως το μαλακας ηταν censored ή αναγραμματισμένο. (...) Και μετα αναρωτιστε γιατι τα 10χρονα κανουν οργια και πανε σε club, η απαντηση βρισκεται μπροστα σας, εσεις τους τα μαθενετε!

Well done guys! We set a good example! At first, words like asshole were censored or anagrammed. (...) And then you're wondering why the 10-year-olds have orgies and go to clubs, the answer is simple, you teach them!

- (17) διότι αυτό ούτε ηθικά ούτε αισθητικά ούτε πνευματικά Θα βελτιώσει την ψυχή του ακροατή (...) οι καλλιτέχνες πλεον προτιμούν να παράγουν προϊόντα νοθης ψυχαγωγίας και το κοινό χωρίς την κατάλληλη κριτική σκέψη τα μετατρέπει σε "καλοκαιρινά χιτακια" .. ήσουν θρύλος ρε Δάντη.

because this does not have a positive moral, aesthetic or spiritual effect on listener (...) artists now prefer to produce entertainment products and the public lacking the required critical thinking turns them into summer hits... Dantis you were a legend.

The comments above take an explicit position against the misogynist nature of the song and its potential for social repercussions in the long run. The ‘best interest of the child’ is another common *topos* of the counter-discourses on gender ideologies found in the polylogue. In this case, users shift the focus from the impact of patriarchal ideologies and songs on women’s wellbeing to the impact these can have on children, possibly targeting at the sensitivity of those with opposing viewpoints. As a perspectivisation strategy, speaking from a children’s interest perspective rather than a woman’s interest perspective may again serve as a strategy to reduce the distance with those favouring patriarchal views and to establish common ground, thus maximising the possibility of their arguments to be heard, understood and respected.

6. Conclusions

This study examined conflicting discourses on VAW in YouTube comments posted in response to the Greek pop song *Καριόλα σε μισώ* ‘Slut I hate you’. In so doing, it adopted a CDA perspective in exploring how posters conceptualize the role of music in relation to VAW and what discursive strategies they employ in both sustaining and challenging relevant gender ideologies.

Our qualitative analysis of the discourses on VAW revealed that comments posted under the videoclip of the song are highly polarised and can be described in terms of two broad categories, i.e. those sustaining and those challenging gendered aggression and misogynist/patriarchal views, therefore, facilitating the discursive construction of in-groups and out-groups. The DHA to the analysis of the presentation of these in-groups and out-groups showed that YouTube users employed different lexicogrammatical choices and discursive strategies depending on their ideologies on VAW. A thematic analysis approach to the conflict arising between these groups

showed that conflict revolves around five main topics: (a) gender aggression, (b) the song, (c) the singer, (d) other users' reactions to the song and (e) contemporary socio-political concerns.

More specifically, explicit language aggression included the use of derogatory terms (e.g. slut, bitch) and terms that dehumanised and objectified women (e.g. gun, butt) as well as *topoi* and stereotyping rooted in patriarchal ideologies (e.g. all women are sluts). Implicit VAW was also justified through comments expressing admiration for the singer and his use of misogynist terms. Besides nomination and predication strategies that showed positive evaluation of the singer (e.g. addressing him in augmentative forms of his first name and surname and using socially deictic expressions), posters also encouraged the singer to continue shaming 'sluts' in his future songs too. Reinforcing the authority of a singer who presents violence as a logical response to feelings of betrayal was also found to be a strategy for indirect legitimisation of verbal and physical VAW. As 51% of the comments analysed were found to sustain VAW, the findings of the present study are in agreement with previous research which indicates that online VAW is pervasive and can thus be seen as a continuum to offline violence.

Importantly, however, a minority of YouTube users engaged, resisted and responded to VAW. In so doing, they either challenged the 'all-women-are-sluts' *topos* offering alternative representations for women (e.g. mothers) or explicitly blamed the singer, the music industry and radio stations for producing songs with sexist content for the purpose of profit and popularity. The lack of control over the content of the videos uploaded on YouTube and the role of audiences supporting such songs was also stressed. The limited interaction among posters and the fact that a large number of comments challenging patriarchal views were probably deleted may be indicative of

the limits of the democratic potential of such conflict on YouTube and the pervasive power of dominant ideologies at the discourse practice level. Yet, this does not mean that expressing ideological conflict on the platform of YouTube is pointless in that such online spaces remain open to counter-hegemonic discourses to which users can be exposed and become more or less active participants.

Also, by examining comments challenging VAW, this study makes a valuable contribution to existing research which has traditionally tended to focus almost exclusively on the analysis of discourses that sustain the phenomenon, ignoring how counter-discourses translate into text and gain visibility. Finally, it should be noted that although several comments contained emojis which seemed to affect the force of the written messages, these were not taken into account in our analysis of conflict. As emojis may play a significant role in altering the emotional load of a text and decreasing ambiguity in digitally mediated communication, future research on conflict could orient to the exploration of the role of emojis in reinforcing or minimising online language aggression against women.

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